

Voluntary Simplicity and Consumption

The effect of non-consumer lifestyle on purchase decision-making

Alexander Ovchinnikov

Bachelor's thesis

May 2017

International Business

Degree programme in International Business

Author Ovchinnikov Alexander	Type of publication Bachelor's thesis	Date May 2017
		Language of publication: English
	Number of pages 58	Permission for web publication: x
Title of publication Voluntary Simplicity and Consumption The effect of non-consumer lifestyle on purchase decision-making		
Degree programme Degree Programme in International Business		
Supervisor(s) Kujala, Irene		
Assigned by		
<p>The background of the thesis relies upon omnipresence of consumer environment. This means that modern society is inseparable from businesses, therefore marketing research constantly expands its understanding of consumers. This study intends to set a starting point of understanding a non-materialist lifestyle in terms of consumer behaviour. Thus, it assumes that even those who oppose themselves to consumerism are, nevertheless, exist within the consumer environment.</p> <p>Thesis explores the effect of non-material values on consumer decision-making process. The exploration considers voluntary simplicity movement that promotes these values most prominently. Hereby, is the oxymoron of the study, which is expressed in contradictory nature of the research, as it explores the non-materialist lifestyle with a materialist purpose, which lies in the very essence of the marketing concept. Theoretical part of the paper firstly observes decision-making and lifestyles in terms of consumer behaviour studies. Secondly it describes the phenomenon of voluntary simplicity to provide a clear representation of non-materialist values and lifestyle in general. Voluntary simplicity ideology was chosen because of its most obvious resistance to materialism.</p> <p>Qualitative data were collected using the method of semi-structured internet mediated interviewing. Results demonstrated that non-materialist lifestyle is of significant effect on consumer decision-making pattern, as occurs in the context of voluntary simplicity. Conclusions of the study suggest how marketing and branding can adjust to non-materialism and precisely – to decision-making process of consumers whose lifestyle is negatively predisposed to consumption.</p>		
Keywords/tags: decision-making, purchase decision process, consumer behaviour, non-materialism, consumer values, voluntary simplicity, consumer consciousness, consumer segmentation, lifestyle, consumer environment.		
Miscellaneous		

Contents

1	Consumer environment and simplicity	3
1.1	Research motivation and objective.....	4
1.2	Research questions	6
1.3	Structure of the study	6
2	Theoretical framework.....	7
2.1	Consumer behaviour	7
2.1.1	Decision-making process	9
2.1.2	Lifestyle and self-concept	15
2.2	Voluntary simplicity.....	17
2.2.1	General overview.....	17
2.2.2	Lifestyle and ideology	19
3	Methodology	25
3.1	Design and strategy	25
3.2	Data collection method	26
3.3	Sampling	28
3.4	Data analysis.....	31
3.5	Research implementation	33
4	Results.....	35
4.1	Problem recognition.....	36
4.2	Information search	37
4.3	Alternatives evaluation	39
4.4	Outlet selection and purchase	41
4.5	Post-purchase.....	42
5	Conclusions	43
5.1	Results summary	43

5.2 Discussion	45
References	50
Appendices	53

Figures

Figure 1. Overall Model of Consumer Behaviour (Hawkins & Mothersbaugh, 2013)...	9
Figure 2. Consumer decision process (Hawkins & Mothersbaugh, 2013).....	36

Tables

Table 1. Product characteristics.....	40
Table 2. Decision process characteristics of voluntary simplifiers.....	44

1 Consumer environment and simplicity

Modern world is hard to imagine without businesses and their products. Thus, the society we live in is often addressed as consumer society (Izberk-Bilgin, 2010; Craig-Lees and Hill, 2002; Davis, 2008). In this world, every individual is a consumer, who is involved in the process of consumption – acquiring products. Business environment is highly interested in understanding consumer characteristics, which constituted the development of consumer behaviour studies. Generally, consumer behaviour is a theoretical framework that describes relations between consumers and companies, whereas products and brands are intermediaries of extreme significance. An important part of consumer behaviour studies is dedicated to consumer research with the purpose to identify the characteristics of behaviour and emphasise them in product design, promotion and placement. Elements of consumer behaviour are applied in marketing research as tools of understanding consumer.

Within this general scheme of consumption, there are many categories of consumers, because individuals are different in their personalities, backgrounds and other characteristics. This study explores a unique category of consumers. Non-materialism is introduced as a general term to address the set of values formed under predisposition to reduced consumption and decreased material affluence in life. Non-materialist values are determinants of numerous social groups. One of these groups is mentioned in academic literature as *voluntary simplicity* (Hoyer et al, 2013; Hawkins & Mothersbaugh, 2013) and appears to be in the focus of this paper. Hoyer et al. (2013, 369) defines voluntary simplicity as a lifestyle of limited acquisition and consumption caused by deliberate intention of living a less material life. In terms of the study this lifestyle is explored as an exemplar of non-materialistic values. It is assumed that in case of voluntary simplicity these values are the most prominent, which minimises relativist understanding of the key terms: materialism and non-materialism. Studying this lifestyle may appear interesting for marketing and business for two reasons. Firstly, voluntary simplicity itself is unique among other non-consumer movements – it promotes individual and intentional consumption reduction, despite the abilities and access to financial and material prosperity (Craig-Lees & Hill, 2002). Moreover, ideology behind the movement is not

subcultural or oppressive. Secondly, reduced consumption may become common in future, as the tendency of conscious consumption is expected to increase. Today this audience is represented by millennials that are more inclined towards the idea of buying less. Henderson (1979) predicted increase of voluntary simplifiers in US up to half of country's population. Experts suggest that the millennials generation is bigger than the boomers but the income is significantly smaller, thus they are more predisposed to abandoning materialistic views of life (Weinswig, 2016; Lewis, 2016).

Based on critique of consumer society (Baudrillard, 1998; Etzioni, 2013; Kasser, 2002; Izberk-Bilgin, 2010) that is supported by traditional marketing literature (Hoyer et al., 2013; Blackwell et al, 2006; Hawkins & Mothersbaugh, 2013) consumers are mentally predisposed to associating themselves with the products they obtain. But the proposition is that voluntary simplifiers, are out of this framework. In other words – they are not practicing traditional consumer behaviour, because their lifestyle is focused on avoiding consumption as much as possible. Thus, there are gaps in understanding of this group of consumers, if it can be identified as such.

1.1 Research motivation and objective

The research objective is to explore the non-materialist individuals within the context of consumption. The research objective is to explore the consumer decision-making as it is practiced within the social phenomenon of voluntary simplicity. Voluntary simplicity is studied as an ideology of resistance to consumption. While consumer behaviour theory is applied in this study to determine the consumer attributes of an utterly non-materialistic social group.

Research purpose is justified by predictions concerning the non-materialist lifestyles are expected to gain more popularity in future (Lewis, 2016). Thus, the valuable information of the study is in understanding how non-materialism affects buying decision-making process. Moreover, the business benefit from the study is in valuable insight about underexplored consumer segment and its attributes, which may assist in prospective marketing strategies and product design.

The thesis aims at creating the consumer profile of the non-consumer segment. The profile is created using existing research about voluntary simplifiers with findings

added as a result of interviewing. This will assist in understanding the specifications of consumer behaviour of individuals who deliberately refrain from consumption. Based on this, the goal is to explain the consumer behaviour concept and relying on theory, explain the consumer behaviour of voluntary simplifiers.

The motivation to explore the voluntary simplicity and consumer behaviour is personal and professional interests of thesis' author. The combination of interests is expressed through paper's contradictory nature, which makes it unique.

Contradiction is in core concepts of the research – marketing theory has a goal of encouraging demand and consumption, while non-consumers are people who avoid it. Voluntary simplicity is a representation of reduced consumption or resistance to consumption. While consumer behaviour is a marketing theory concept that observes individuals as consumers. Contradictory nature of the thesis makes it unique as the whole ideology of voluntary simplicity, despite being broadly discussed in research papers of other fields (Kasser, 2002; Kasser & Kanner, 2003; Izberk-Bilgin, 2010; Etzioni, 2013), remains underexplored within marketing. While it is fact that anti-consumerist social groups, despite their views, are a part of consumer society. Ergo, these social groups can be perceived as ones composed of a very unique consumers – ones that are not predisposed to buying.

Moreover, it may appear beneficial to businesses through stressing the significance of quality products as an alternative to high volume production strategy encouraging frequent consumption. Business application of the study can be seen in formulating the rare segment profiling of voluntary simplifiers - a highly conscious consumer group, which is unlikely to be responsive to advertising and inclined to ignoring the superficial effects of illusive sustainability and greenwashing. This group represents the lifestyle that is considered as prospectively growing. This may lead to the necessity of understanding of this consumer segment within the consumer behaviour framework. The information can be used to adjust marketing and sales techniques to target this niche segment of consumer population.

1.2 Research questions

Research questions relate to the research problem through emphasising the research topic in and narrowing it down to a feasible focus area. The research questions to be addressed in the study are:

How non-material lifestyle affects consumer decision process?

How marketing strategy can address non-material values of consumers?

First question focuses on exploration of the effect that non-material lifestyle on consumer behaviour. This question refers to theoretical exploration of decision-making and lifestyles. Further, this theory is applied in empirical data collection to determine how non-materialistic lifestyle values affect the purchase decision-making process. It provides preliminary description of lifestyles as discussed in terms of consumer behaviour, and explanation of what is the lifestyle of voluntary simplicity. Second question addresses the marketing aspect. The results of the study present the characteristics of decision-making process within the context of voluntary simplicity lifestyle. Additionally, it provides recommendations on how these characteristics can be applied in targeting this consumer group and gaining their loyalty. Ergo, this will become a recommendation to businesses' marketing agenda.

1.3 Structure of the study

Methodologically, the study is qualitative. Research intends to gather the information from consumer behaviour theory, which is required to objectively understand the decision-making and lifestyles. Following this, the research focuses on providing a reference about voluntary simplifiers. Theoretical insights about the lifestyle of simplicity serve as an introduction for further behaviour understanding. Then, this will be supported by a qualitative semi-structured interviewing of segment representatives. Interview provides primary information, which allows formulating behavioural findings concerning the decision purchase voluntary simplifiers.

The structure of the thesis is built to sequentially expose core concepts to the reader. This takes through chapters and subchapters composed and placed accordingly to the logic. The composition logic is characterised by development from general

overview of the concept towards closer look at details. This means that theoretically study observes consumer behaviour, then analyse what is known about voluntary simplicity as one of the representations of non-consumer ideology. Then it leads to practical value of the paper is in collecting and analysing data from the representatives of the social group resisting to consumption.

Chapter 2 provides theoretical background that is necessary for the study. It reveals briefly the concept of consumer behaviour, then aims at depicting the core concepts of decision-making and lifestyles as per consumer behaviour theory. Third chapter provides the necessary methodological insight about the conducted research. Following is the fourth chapter, which depicts and summarises results of the study. Conclusion and discussion sum up the results, providing the general reflection on the implemented study. Discussion part shows the way that studied concept should be investigated in forthcoming studies and what kind of studies should be conducted on the topic as per author of the paper.

2 Theoretical framework

This chapter is a theoretical part of the paper. It is designed to reveal the core concepts: decision-making, lifestyles and voluntary simplicity. Firstly, it establishes the theoretical ground concernign consumer behaviour, its general characteristics and components. Secondly, this chapter provides the background and characteristics of voluntary simplicity lifestyle.

2.1 Consumer behaviour

Consumer behaviour as per marketing literature (Blackwell et al., 2006) refers to activities and processes of individuals undertaken when obtaining, consuming and disposing services and products. It is valuable for understanding how process of consumption is constructed. Researchers (ibid, 2006) suggest that consumer behaviour study is a theory in the basis of marketing research. Which searches for reasons and ways of using and buying products. In other words – why and how people consume. Consumer behaviour is inseparable from marketing practices and concept in general. Reasoning is that consumer behaviour theory and research

assists in executing marketing. Marketing appears as the process of planning, executing and operating pricing, promotion, and distribution of ideas, products and services to stimulate the consumer exchange with the purpose of individual and organisational goals satisfaction (ibid, 2006, 4). Thus, consumer behaviour studies have the purpose of increasing marketing efficiency.

Consumption is defined as a process where goods and services are at last point of their lifecycle – put to final use by people (Blackwell et al, 2006). Buskirk and Rothe (1970) suggested that two opposing theories are in place regarding the position and role of consumers. First justifies that consumer owns the decisive power in making decisions, preferences and spending, which altogether signify failure or success of a product or service. Other theory establishes the position of consumers are recessive and manipulated players of the game, in which consumer does not own predominant control and rationality in purchase behaviours. Researchers suppose that both theories, despite their contradictory nature, obtain certain degree of truth. This paper concentrates on exploration of decision-making process as part of consumer behaviour.

Hawkins and Mothersbaugh (2013, 6) add to definition that the purpose of consumer behaviour studies is knowledge about needs satisfaction and the impacts of consumption on the consumer and society (Hawkins & Mothersbaugh, 2013, p. 6). According to many academics (Blackwell et al, 2006; Hawkins & Mothersbaugh, 2013; Hoyer et al, 2013) consumer behaviour is a complex model in which consumer is affected by many aspects of psychological and social type. Hawkins and Mothersbaugh (2013) describe consumer behaviour model (Figure 1) as process in which consumer is affected by external and internal influences. These influences communicate with the self-concept and lifestyle. Based on needs and desires these influences affect the decision process. Entire scheme is unified by ongoing processes of experiences and acquisitions. This means that consumer environment is dynamic and elements may change depending on what consumer buys and experiences. Nevertheless, to avoid vagueness and ensure focus, this study observes only decision making process. These are mentioned in earlier discussion of the thesis. Decision-making refers to practical implementation of consumption process. While self-

concept, for example, justifies that consumer needs and wants are formed and accepted inseparable from consumer identity (Baudrillard, 1998; Kasser, 2009).

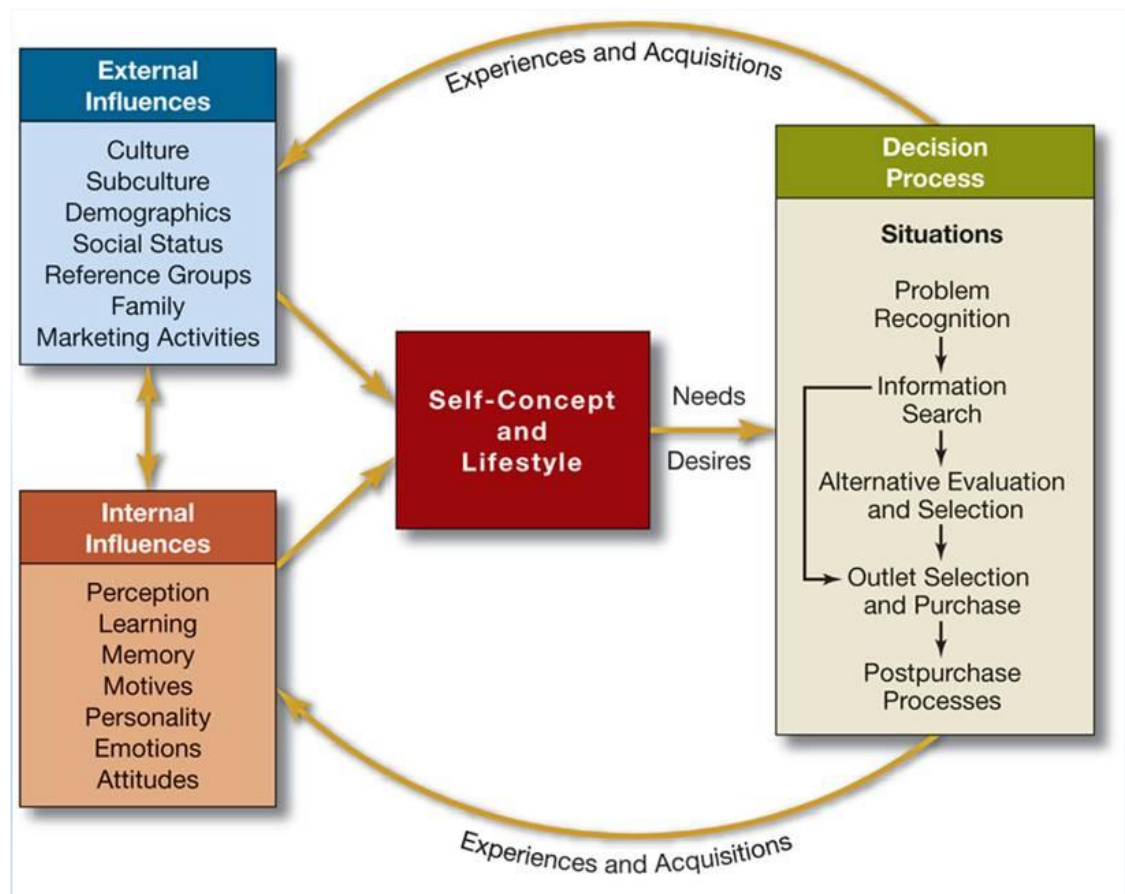


Figure 1. Overall Model of Consumer Behaviour (Hawkins and Mothersbaugh, 2013)

Following subchapter investigates the decision-making process according to the model demonstrated in the right column of the overall consumer behaviour model (Figure 1). Additionally, following chapter covers how consumer behaviour theory observes consumer lifestyle.

2.1.1 Decision-making process

Since the research aims at understanding the consumer behaviour, the focus is on decision making process that appears to be one of the most significant elements. This process is a surface of consumption and a result of all influences, lifestyle and self-concept (Figure 1). Hawkins and Mothersbaugh (2013, 461) note that complete decision process, which consists of 5 sequential stages, occurs only in the situations of consumer's high effort in the purchasing process. Effort (or involvement) as per

Hoyer et al. (2013) is determined by the level of extensive thinking and elaboration practiced by consumer throughout the decision process. Five stages of decision process are described as follows.

Problem recognition

The first stage of decision process is problem recognition. Sometimes addressed as “need recognition” (Blackwell et al, 2006). During this stage consumer becomes aware of needs and wants exist. This stage is coherent with the perception phase of comparison between current self-perception (actual state) and desired image (ideal state). This is considered a critically important stage of decision process as it triggers consumer to implement consumer action (Hoyer et al, 2013). Intrinsic comparison of two states usually leads to dissatisfaction by current state. Quite often this state of dissatisfaction is caused by marketing effort, like in case when the runner (consumer) perceived already owned running shoes as ones that are satisfactory from the practical point of view (running is fine in them). But when consumer is exposed to advertising of any kind, it may lead to dissatisfaction and currently obtained product becomes less attractive. This constitutes the problem recognition, which is normally constituted by the actual state and ideal state that confront each other in consumer’s mind (e.g.: running shoes are not cool anymore – actual state; owning new, fashionable, extra-light running shoes – ideal state).

Information search

Secondly, the consumer is expected to go through the stage of information search. This stage signifies any kind of intellectual effort on the way towards identified need (problem) satisfaction. It can make consumer turn to past experiences, package observation or start a complete research in the web. The effort depends on the price and importance of the purchase. This stage serves the purpose of acknowledge the key requirements and options to choose from. Normally, consumer obtains multiple options for the purchase when completing this stage, but prior to that consumer is involved into seeking for information. Information search can be of two types: external or internal. By internal search researchers (Hoyer et al., 2013) mean that information is retrieved from consumer’s memory, past experiences, attitudes and

feelings. While external search attributes to outside sources such as friends, relatives, advertising, published sources, the internet or the product package.

Psychological insight of this stage is described in terms of the information processing. As per Blackwell et al. (2006) the procession is implemented in the following order: exposure, attention, comprehension, acceptance and retention. Briefly, this means that information firstly reaches the consumer (exposure), then relevant message gains attention. After attention, message is mentally interpreted by the consumer (comprehension). Thus, through attention, exposure turns to comprehension. But the message further can be dismissed or accepted (acceptance), which does not necessary equal to formal yes or no to a product. Consumer can dismiss information on the package, but still buy the product, similarly as he or she can go through profound exploration of the information about the product but still refrain from purchase (and vice versa. This, again, depends on the effort. Final stage information processing is retention. On this stage information takes place in the memory, thus becoming accessible for future access. Earlier mentioned term of consumer information search effort is applicable throughout these steps, which accordingly become more profound and effortful accordingly to significance of applied attributes.

Alternatives evaluation

Third stage is focused on evaluation of alternatives. By this stage the information is gathered, thus consumer is aware of both needs and options. In marketing theory products are entitled with attributes that appear as characteristics in the basis of consumers' alternatives evaluation and comparison. The consumer inclines towards an alternative that obtains the higher quantity of attributes and meets the most valuable of them. Attributes are known as variables that are identified based on consumers' perceptions, experiences and attitudes. In this way, for example, one consumer will prefer the clothing item that has higher quality of material, while another will prefer same kind of item by another brand, just because consumer is more concerned of brand's image or colour (first consumer values material quality over other attributes, that may remain valuable; second consumer values brand image and style attributes as predominant). Blackwell et al. (2006) justify that the abovementioned concept of values is established in marketing theory as evaluative

criteria, which appear as standards and characteristics operated in comparison of alternatives. Some researchers (Hoyer et al., 2013) observe this stage as a part of consumers' effort, which similarly to information search means that consumer evaluates options deeper and comes up with more attributes, depending on the importance of the purchase.

Outlet selection and purchase

Purchase decision and transaction are beyond the fourth step of decision process. After the preference is developed supported by the awareness of needs, possible options and attributes, consumer follows the need towards the purchase or transaction stage. During this stage consumer's interest transforms to the physical exchange of money to product or service. Notably, Blackwell et al. (2006) divides this stage into two: purchase, during which consumer chooses a retailer and experiences the in-store environment; and consumption – taking possession of the product. During both sub-stages consumer answers questions of: when, what, where to buy the product and how to pay (Blackwell et al., 2006). In low-involvement purchasing it usually happens subconsciously, whereas high-effort shopping, on the contrary, presumes profound elaborations. Thus, according to theory (ibid, 2006), at this stage and depending on previous ones, purchases can be fully planned, partially planned or unplanned.

Post-purchase behaviour

Last stage of consumer behaviour is known as post-purchase behaviour. This refers to period following the purchase that may vary depending on customers and type of product. In terms of behaviour this stage means that consumer is using the product or have already used it. Consumer have already experienced interaction with the purchase, regardless to whether the process of utilisation (usage) is continuous or rapid. The stage of post-purchase behaviour derives implications of psychology in a way that consumer consciously or less consciously makes a reflection that constitutes satisfaction or dissatisfaction. This stage of consumption resembles the trial-and-error process. This means that evaluation stage constitutes general satisfaction with the product or absence of it, thus forming consumers' attitude towards product, category of products or more in another dimension – entire brand or cluster of

brands of similar identity. Generally, satisfaction is indeed processed this way and establishes attitudes. But thinking of emotional side of this satisfaction from the product, it can be argued that pleasure of product usage (post-purchase) fades away as the time goes. Thus, any product is at its peak satisfaction level during the early stage of usage. Later, satisfaction may diminish or remain stable. For example, the satisfaction level is at its objective peak point and most pronounced during the early stage of using a newly-obtained car. Whereas, later, car turns into a casual part of daily life and sensation of pleasure (if such was in the beginning) becomes less obvious and value of the product is then more practical.

Involvement

A factor of involvement (effort) level was mentioned throughout the above-mentioned stages. Terms of effort and involvement are used interchangeably in various sources. For example, Hoyer et al. (2013) use the term of effort, while Hawking and Mothersbaugh (2013) describe same element of consumer thinking as involvement.

It should be clarified that consumer process may be different at low and high involvement. Zaichkowsky (1994) defined consumer involvement as a motivational state stimulated by consumer's perception of a product, brand or its promotional exposure as interesting or relevant. Hawkins and Mothersbaugh (2013, 361) suggest that involvement is important to consider for marketers. The reason is that high involvement increases attention, analytical effort, information search and other elements of individual consumer behaviour. High-involvement purchasing means that consumer's search is aimed at collecting specific and in-depth information about products. While low-involvement decision process is implemented more subconsciously and automatically. Prominent example of this will be comparing two opposite types of products in this concern – a car (high-involvement) versus groceries like milk (low-involvement). Ergo, advertising about cars contains more in-depth information, while packaging of milk has only general description required by legislation. Consumer is likely to explore the information deeply in high-effort purchases and neglect it in low-effort ones.

Marketing implications of decision making process

Understanding of these stages are utilised by salespeople, designers and marketers with the purpose to make the offer more attractive for the customer and increase satisfaction. For example, marketers can use audio or visual information (advertising) with the purpose of creating new ideal state, which signifies problem recognition (e.g.: showing the model in new clothes of the brand creates difference between the ideal and current state). Tech retailers often embed the option to compare products into their websites, which contributes to the processes of alternatives evaluation and information search. Other examples emphasise the inevitable dissatisfaction on the post-purchase stage. Marketers can assist consumers to reduce the post-purchase dissonance and regret by offering additional activities like brand community membership, discounted or free maintenance and other benefits.

Involvement can be addressed by marketers to adjust the advertising to manipulate the consumer depending on involvement level. As mentioned, more information and details should be exposed to consumer to satisfy the information search and evaluation requirements of high-effort purchases. On the contrary, low-involvement purchases allow emphasis on emotional and aesthetical elements of advertising, design and branding.

Ethical implications of studying consumer purchasing behaviour is on the other side. Consumer behaviour theory (Hoyer et al., 2013) brings various examples of unethical and deviant consumer behaviour – types of behaviour that create controversies in the context of acquisition, consumption and disposition. These are necessary for discussion, as appear the closest to the actual dialogue between companies and consumers.

These controversies prove the harmful nature of interconnection between consumer environment and materialist values. For example, *acquisition*, includes all types of consumer issues related to the stage of acquiring products (decision-making occurs). Per Hoyer et al. (2013) one of these is materialistic behaviour – predisposition towards material value in life, which is inseparable from consumption. A good example of materialism dominance is that even during economic downfalls, luxury brands keep stable increase of purchases. As Hoyer et al, (2013) justifies materialism is neutral, yet assumes critique is reasonable as it drives consumers towards acquiring products they do not need, want and even unable to afford. It is noticed

that materialism can be a result of upbringing – passed from parents to children as family and personal values. According to Goldberg et al. (2003) materialistic young people are predisposed to shopping more and saving less, moreover – appear more responsive to marketing effort. Hoyer et al. (2013) concludes that the major problem about consumer environment promoting materialistic values is that advertising formulates a misperception of reality, within which consumers may overestimate the meaning and value of possessions in terms of personality and perception of others.

2.1.2 Lifestyle and self-concept

Lifestyle, as per glossary in Hoyer et al. (2013), is defined as people's behavioural patterns. This term originates from sociology studies, where it was introduced by Alfred Adler in 1950s (Boeree, 1997). Later the term of lifestyle was adopted in marketing theory and research together with other concepts as demographics and psychographics, which are widely used in marketing research to describe consumers. Marketing theory (Hawkins & Mothersbaugh, 2013) observes lifestyle as the way of living, with an emphasis on how one's style of living influences consumer behaviour and vice versa.

Marketing studies (Hawkins & Mothersbaugh, 2013) determine measurements of lifestyles, which are known as psychographics and used for qualitative and quantitative analysis of consumer lifestyles. These measurements, as per theory (ibid, 2013), include following: attitudes, values, interests, activities, media patterns and usage rates. Additionally, demographics are often adjusted as possible lifestyle determinant, meaning that way of living can be determined by age, gender, income, occupation, nationality and geography. Similarly, these characteristics affect consumer behaviour, thus consumer behaviour and lifestyle appear as interchangeable concepts when used in terms of marketing studies.

Lifestyle influences consumer behaviour in general and purchase decision process. This means that consumers' way of living determines their consumption, same as consumed products and services can be a determinant of one's lifestyle. For example, lifestyle can be predetermined by a subculture consumer belongs. Thus, this consumer obtains a set specific characteristics of this subculture (activities,

interests, attitudes, expectations, feelings, etc.), which, in turn, affects buying preferences.

Self-concept represents the view of individuals on who they are (Hoyer et al., 2013), also commonly known as self-identity or self-perception. Hawkins and Mothersbaugh (2013) observe self-concept within consumer behaviour theory as a dualistic concept. This is explained through two dimensions of self: private and social. Based on this, researchers (ibid, 2013) correlate these two states with actual and ideal states of consumers, which are simultaneously coexisting in terms of both social and private selves. If actual state and ideal state represent current and desired state, then actual self-concept and ideal self-concept demonstrate how individual views himself currently and what kind of identity is desired. Similarly, social self refers to how people around see the individual versus how one desires to be seen. Regarding contradiction between private and social self, it is easy to track the similarities with cultural theories (Hofstede, 2001), where these are expressed as individualistic and collectivistic behaviours. In marketing theory (Hawkins and Mothersbaugh, 2013) individualism dimension is addressed as independent self-concept, accordingly collectivism appears as interdependent self-concept. This means that independent self-concept emphasises predominantly on personal aspects of life, whereas interdependent self-concept concentrates on external influences.

Lifestyles and consumer behaviour are closely related with the self-concept. Consumer behaviour is affected by self-concept through relationship between product or brand image and consumer's self-concept. Therefore, consumer behaviour is established under influence of consumers contributing to their perception of self through meaning of products and services they consume. For example, a consumer who views himself/herself as a heavy metal music fan (self-concept and lifestyle) affirms self-concept through purchases like music recordings, thematic clothing, events tickets. These consumed attributes (products and services) are in relation with the self-concept and lifestyle of an individual, which is the main reason of consumption in this case. According to Hawkins and Mothersbaugh (2013) the positive relationship between consumer's self-concept and image of consumed products leads to consumer satisfaction. But the problem is that individuals can

rarely be determined by only one lifestyle or single self-concept. It is normally a variety that is not always represented in one unified idea.

2.2 Voluntary simplicity

2.2.1 General overview

Originally, the term of voluntary simplicity first mentioned by Gregg (1936), but later was widely used in numerous studies and fields (Elgin and Mitchell, 1977; Range & Smale; Iwata 1997,1999; Shama & Wisenblit, 1984; Maniates, 2002). The idea is established as an alternative to consumption based upon “inner sincerity and honesty” and “avoidance of exterior clutter”. Elgin (1993) explains the idea of voluntary simplicity through defining words separately. First word of the term means living voluntarily – more deliberately, intentionally and purposefully, more consciously in general. While second word of simplicity stands for living with a minimised unnecessary distraction. Regarding consumption, this can be transcribed as a combination of consumer consciousness, which leads to reduced consumption. In consumer behaviour literature (Hoyer et al., 2013, 369) voluntary simplicity is defined as limiting acquisition and consumption for the sake of living a less material life. Researchers mention idea of voluntary simplicity as opposite to conspicuous and superfluous consumption. Hawkins & Mothersbaugh (2013) provide more details, explaining that voluntary simplicity may apply to minor life adjustment and reduced spending, but also may appear a drastic change in lifestyle, including downsized jobs, incomes, houses and expenses.

It appears that consumer-driven lifestyle and wealth is the source of dissatisfaction and problems that are solved by simplifying lifestyle. Hawkins & Mothersbaugh (2013) provide a justification that focus on materialism in consumer-driven society makes people increase labour time to afford material possessions. As researchers (ibid., 2013) move on, simplicity movements occurred as a reaction to materialism becoming a norm. Increased number of people feel role overload, professional burnout and emotional exhaustion. This made people predisposed towards rethinking of life priorities by simplifying lifestyles. Voluntary simplicity (ibid., 2013) boasts major factors opposed to materialist society depression, which are: reduced

stress, increased life satisfaction and meaningfulness combined with other motivations such as environmentalism.

Henderson (1979) mentioned the Stanford Institute expert predictions on the amount voluntary simplifiers in the US, which was expected to turn 60 million by year of 2000. Nowadays, this prediction is considered untrue. Nevertheless, there is no credible research that identifies the proportion of voluntary simplifiers in the global population. Predominantly, this is because simplicity or non-consuming movements may appear under various labels. For example, The Minimalists (theminimalists.com) is a big community consisting of 20 million people (globally), but there was not a single time they proclaimed themselves as voluntary simplifiers, despite the fact of these two sharing the same ideology. So, the issue is enclosed in all these movements focused on reduction of consumption, minimisation of material affluence, downshifting, etc. are not present as a predetermined subculture. Meaning, that there are non-consumers unaware of a term of “voluntary simplifier”, but they may follow the ideology behind it. The idea is unobvious in the society, as Barton (2015) mentions these movements are not movements of altruism or self-sacrifice, rather they represent the alternative ways superior to a lifestyle of consumption.

Simplicity is a lifestyle that is not actively expressed by individuals practicing it. Etzioni (1999) identifies various types of voluntary simplifiers: downshifters, strong simplifiers and holistic simplifiers. Downshifters are identified as wealthy individuals that partially refrain from some purchases they can afford but generally keep to consumer lifestyle. Researcher (ibid, 1999) adds that downshifters superficially address consumption. Barton (2015) notes that downshifters practice certain degree of moderation in consumption, without deeply exploring personal values, needs as well as consumption in general. Label of “strong simplifiers” implies that this group of simplifiers implement strong commitment to simplicity ideology. Strong simplifiers are identified as those who significantly reduce consumption and may even deliberately deny higher income despite their capability for it. It can be expressed in voluntary reduction of working hours, preferring simpler labour and generally by significant cut in consumption. Third category is holistic simplifiers, which represents

people whose lifestyle changes are predominantly motivated by an anti-consumerist philosophy.

Sometimes voluntary simplicity is considered an anti-consumerism movement. Reasoning of that is in abundance and accumulation of possessions become major characteristics of consumer society (Jansiz, 2013), while simplicity ideology promotes values opposite to these. The concept of anti-consumerism, though, is utterly vague and provides no precision necessary for the study. Many different social groups are involved into reduction of consumption, thus can be labelled as “holistic simplifiers”. It can be hippies, bitniks, anarchists, Marxists, socialists, environmental activists and others. These social sub-groups have certain traits of voluntary simplicity. Nevertheless, this study observes voluntary simplicity as a lifestyle, which is not reasoning from anti-corporate, social equality, environmental or any other types of activism. Moreover, as per Hawkins & Mothersbaugh (2013) simplicity movements appear a result of voluntary, conscious decision, not one brought on by economic necessity. This justified the sampling for interviewing (chapters 3 and 4), which focused to filter out downshifters and holistic simplifiers, who are either belong to consumer culture or actively oppose consumerism. Whereas strong simplifiers are considered as the most prominent and unbiased representation of simplicity and its non-materialist lifestyle.

Main idea of voluntary simplicity is in its opposition to consumption as it is. Ideology of simplicity is not opposed to any political, economic or corporate agenda, it is opposed to having material focus in life, thus – opposed to materialism, without targeted negativity consumer and corporate culture themselves.

2.2.2 Lifestyle and ideology

To establish understanding of voluntary simplicity as a consumer segment, it is necessary to describe its background. Voluntary simplicity is a unique case as population of this group is present across social classes, cultural backgrounds and income levels. Therefore, their consumer behaviour cannot be identified in terms of traditional categorisation.

Attitudes

Attitudes are evaluative statements other people, places, ideas and products (Hawkins and Mothersbaugh, 2013). Attitudes describe groups of consumers through demonstrating their common opinion on something, which at some extent becomes an aspect that assists in categorisation. In this manner, modern marketing implements segmentation. This suggests that a group of consumers is identified by their attitude to something (e.g. positive attitude to organic food and negativity towards fast-food).

One of the key characteristics of voluntary simplicity is deliberate choice of emphasises its opposition to materialism, thus excessive consumption. Therefore, major attitude of voluntary simplicity lifestyle is non-materialistic view of life. Some researchers call it material simplicity (Craig-Lees and Hill, 2002). The concept of materialism is complex and deserves being separately studied, but it can be concluded that voluntary simplicity is non-materialistic. In consumer behaviour, it means that practisers of this ideology are not predisposed to frequent shopping and other consumer activities. Alexander et al. (2012) observe attitudes of simplifiers towards money by bringing a crucial relation between labour and leisure time. Money as personal or household budgets appear under complete control and consciousness. Simplifiers are into planning and tracking all factual and prospective purchases. Consumed products are a subject of analysis intended to define each item's necessity and value. These and other techniques assist in avoiding excess spending and increase consumer consciousness to ensure reduced consumption.

Regarding materialism Alexander et al. (2012) introduce the phenomenon of psychology of things. Understanding of psychology of things means mental liberation from the advertised meaning and external messages of marketing that communicate certain values of products. Simplifiers embrace the approach of consumer consciousness or form of minimalism, as per Alexander et al. (2012), through finding the intrinsic actual and prospective value of the possessions or items that are considered as possible purchase. This psychological understanding of possessions constitutes breaking the "stuff requiring stuff" rule, which was described as Diderot effect and Diderot unity in consumer behaviour theory. This stands for various aspects of consumer behaviour in which, as per McCracken (1988), meaning of a new product has the influence on perception of other possessions in a way of devaluation

of the latter ones that causes consumer dissatisfaction. Based on the Diderot effect in consumption, simplifiers exercise avoidance of “chain” consumption, which means purchasing new things because other recently obtained products require supplementary ones. In this way simplifiers liberate from the predominant interference of products image and marketing with the personal identity, therefore avoid repetitive or cluster purchases which should fit the identity communicated by the other ones, thus increasing unnecessary consumption. Practically, such consciousness aimed at avoidance of Diderot effect is implemented through second hand store purchasing, functional and simple clothing, quantity reduction opposed to quality focus, own production and repair of items. Also, it is addressed through examination of value, for example, when a simplifier refrains from instantly replacing a broken technical device to understand if it is possible to live without it, therefore understanding once again, whether it is a necessity or a subject of excess and abundance.

Additionally, voluntary simplifiers are known to express other attitudes. Research on voluntary simplicity lifestyle (Alexander & Ussher, 2011) displayed that one of the most prominent attitudes are various manifestations of environmental sustainability. This creates misperception about voluntary simplicity being just a new term for green, social or political activism. The distinction between these and voluntary simplicity may, indeed, seem insignificant. The reason is that many of voluntary simplifiers practice same activities, thus can be considered green or ethical consumers from social and ecological perspectives. Nevertheless, simplifiers are not predominantly driven by these values. The internal focus is the unique trait of voluntary simplification. This means that predominant attitude within voluntary simplicity lifestyle is still non-materialism, while other attitudes appear to be supplementary, but not determinant and obligatory.

Values

In case of lifestyle description, value means widely held belief about (Hawkins and Mothersbaugh, 2013). It is one of the characteristics of lifestyle as per marketing theory (ibid, 2013).

Voluntary character of intentions differentiates voluntary simplifiers from individuals who may be forced or motivated to reduce consumption. For example, low-income household may have all characteristics of simplicity, but the situation and their lifestyle are caused by income, which in case of increase will inevitably turn this lifestyle to a consumerist one. Similarly, an individual that is saving up to afford luxury purchase is a non-voluntary simplifier, since the choice of simplicity is justified by desires related with consumption in other category than daily purchases. Generally saying, voluntary character of simplicity (or free will) mean that voluntary simplifiers are individuals that have access to wealth, and obtain qualities of education and unique skills that could be exchanged for high income, but have preferred not to do so (Craig-Lees & Hill, 2002).

Elgin and Mitchell (1977) observe five values voluntary simplicity is constructed on: material simplicity, humanism, self-determination, ecological awareness and personal growth. McDonald (2014) inclines towards interpretation of voluntary simplicity based on number of values other than just reduced consumption. Researcher (ibid, 2014) justifies this mentioning these elements as ones that differentiate voluntary simplicity from others: free will, limiting consumption; alternative sources of satisfaction.

Activities and interests

Hawkins & Mothersbaugh (2013) provide more details, explaining that voluntary simplicity may apply to minor life adjustment and reduced spending, but also may appear a drastic change in lifestyle, including downsized jobs, incomes, houses and expenses. Mazza (1997) and Etzioni (1998, 2013) agree with this by noting that this social group practices simple living, sustainability lifestyle, downshifting and frugality, which are major values. Kahle (1995) sees psychological reasoning of voluntary simplicity and its relation with consumer behaviour through considering simplicity ideology is created by two oppositely-directed activities: maximisation of control over daily life on one side, and minimisation of consumption and material dependency on another side.

Some of voluntary simplicity activities reminisce environmentalism. This includes such elements of daily life as nutrition, transportation, energy consumption. Other

practices of this kind are: local food support, community production and production instead of consumption, organic and healthy nutrition, waste reduction, sustainable energy and water consumption. Though, unlike many of environmentalists, simplifiers are usually aware of greenwashing and green consumerism, which, nevertheless, is consumerism. Meaning that green consumerism, despite sustainable nature, can also be a subject of abundance and excess, thus should become a subject of reduction, opposed to general trend of increased willingness to buy more, just because products are organic (Kyriakopoulos & van Dijk, 1997; Magnusson et al., 2001).

Regarding labour, simplifiers practice professional downshifting - the decrease of labour hours, if possible. Quite often it appears to be unrealistic, yet simplifiers show some practices related to the working place and salary. Firstly, simplicity lifestyle promotes living near the working place, which decreases stress on the way to work. This also applies to avoiding business trips when these can be replaced by telecommunications. Secondly, working, in case labour hours cannot be decreased and job is done effectively, may lead to raise in salary. Regarding this, simplicity, offers avoid celebration, which often practiced and appears to be either a representation of conspicuous consumption or, most often, compulsive consumption. Saving the raise, keep on living as usual, and later spend the savings bank mindfully for something valuable or think of number of jobless days/months it can serve as an income.

Reduced labour hours lead to reduced income and consumption. This is practices deliberately with the purpose to obtain more time and energy for self-development, creativity, social interactions with friends and families, and other meaningful, non-materialist activities. Among these activities some researchers (Elgin, 1993; Etzioni, 2013; McDonald, 2014) mention spiritual inclination of voluntary simplifiers, similarly as representatives of this movement often address the simplified period of their lives as one of life examination.

Decluttering is a very popular practice among simplifiers. Term of decluttering means organisation and minimisation of mess. This practice includes constant questioning about the value and quality that possessions bring to life. Decluttering, thus, promotes avoiding unnecessary possessions. This aspect is particularly interesting as

constitutes fundamental rule of simplicity: living more (life meaningfulness) with less (material affluence). Meaning, that value of life is retrieved from less material possessions. According to “the minimalists” community (theminimalists.com), which promotes simplicity, average American citizen owns up to 3000 items, while a simplifier is happy with having 10 times less.

Other simplicity practices and characteristics of lifestyle cover various activities. These are: self-development, socialising, entertainment, community position and practices like meditation, non-buying Christmas, donations, cleaning without cleaning products and free sports (Alexander & Ussher, 2011; Basci, 2014). These activities bring satisfaction from lifestyle, self and socialisation. The emphasis is that satisfaction can be retrieved without compulsory consumption. Moreover, voluntary simplicity promotes events and activities like no-buying Christmas and no-buying day. These have the purpose to emphasise the excessive commercialisation of holidays. Thus, a holiday like Christmas is valuable because of being together with a family or loved ones, not getting presents. Similarly, sports should improve physical and emotional state of an individual, thus there’s no necessity in obtaining a wide range of sport accessories and getting a gym subscription, when shorts, pair of running shoes and outdoor environment are enough for satisfying the need of practicing sports and getting its benefits.

Media patterns

As noticed by Elgin and Mitchell (1977) voluntary simplifiers are unlikely to be affected or using any media. This statement is proved in the modern age by McDonald (2014) through assumption that voluntary simplifiers’ self-determination makes them look to their personal values rather than being driven by media or other people. Nevertheless, majority of modern voluntary simplifiers are present in social networks and internet. This is partially justified as most of the voluntary simplicity handbooks and guides are currently published digitally. Moreover, simplicity lifestyle sees media exposure as not harmful, only that it should be a subject of conscious control. By control simplicity often means minimisation of external influence. For example, by implementation of decluttering practices that allow users eliminate the unnecessary and make using the internet simple and focused.

3 Methodology

3.1 Design and strategy

As per Saunders et al. (2009) research design can be defined as a general plan that guides the research questions towards resolution. Thus, research design justifies the logical connection between objectives, questions and implementation. This establishes study's relevance and consistency. Traditional business research framework (ibid, 2009) identifies three types of research design: descriptive, explanatory and exploratory. Design choice depends on purpose and the nature of research, yet theory (Robson, 2002; Saunders et al., 2009) justifies that just like research questions, design of the study can appear as indefinite combination, for example of exploratory and descriptive.

This study is an exploratory one. As Saunders et al. (2009, 139-140) note, exploratory design is especially useful when clarifying the understanding of the problem or nature of the problem appears to be unclear and unprecise. This ambiguity is obvious as non-materialist lifestyles are underexplored within consumer behaviour studies.. Descriptive nature of the research, in case of this study, stands for depiction of the social group's profile. Based on this – research pursues the purpose of exploring and understanding the consumer decision-making process of a unique consumer group. Thus, two subject are correlated as descriptive design of consumer group complies with the exploratory nature, as research assesses phenomenon of voluntary simplicity in the context of consumer behaviour.

Saunders et al. (2009) is mentions research strategy as framework that has to be chosen accordingly to research questions and objectives, similarly to research design. Known research strategies may be implemented within various designs relying on existing knowledge, time and other resources available. In the same way as different designs can be combined theory (ibid, 2009) suggests that various strategies are not expected to be mutually exclusive. In this framework, there are variety of strategies, of which most traditional ones are surveys, experiments and case studies.

Hancock (1998) introduces the strategy of phenomenology – which means the research of a certain phenomenon. This research strategy most fits this study,

considering that studied phenomenon is voluntary simplicity, which is explored both theoretically and practically. Core phenomenon, though, relies on secondary data on consumerism and consumer behaviour, which is used as a background discussion to provide fundamental knowledge for new insights.

The reason of choosing phenomenology is based on assumption that phenomenon of voluntary simplicity reveals the niche in consumer studies, which makes a quality combination with ambiguous nature of exploratory design. As per Hancock (1998) phenomenological research begins with the acknowledgement of the gap in understanding and that clarification will be beneficial, moreover phenomenological research is devoid of necessarily providing the definitive explanations but rather raises awareness and increases insight. Similarly Saunders et al. (2009) suggest that tangible and applicable result is not certain for exploratory researchers, rather than it explores researcher's supposedly beneficial theory regarding certain problem.

Phenomenology can be applied within deductive, inductive or combined research approaches. Nevertheless, in this research, phenomenon is investigated deductively. Phenomena is elaborated from theory, hypotheses are build upon. Further, research narrows down towards smaller scale conclusions and assumptions confirmed. This tendency is visible as per study sub-topics studied: firstly, the concept is very general – consumerism, secondarily it is consumer behaviour, then – particular social group and finally this social group within the context of consumer behaviour.

3.2 Data collection method

Research's design justifies the approach to data collection and analysis processes. Yet, even though data of any type can be gathered through various methods, still there are certain correlations between data type and collection method.

Quantitative data, for instance, deals with numeric data that is generated in result of such collection technique as questionnaire and analysed through graphs or statistics. Alternatively, qualitative data, as per Saunders et al. (2009, 151), is utilised predominantly for data collection methods (such as interviewing) and analysis procedures (categorisation) and generates non-numeric data.

Methodological nature of this research is qualitative because it investigates phenomenon through conceptual explanations, thus - generation of non-numeric data. Regarding the data collection method phenomenon was researched through accumulation of qualitative primary and secondary data. Primary data collection for the research's final stage is implemented through semi-structured individual interviews.

Data collection process is required to access the information that answers research question. Research questions are answered through primary and secondary data. Primary data is defined as data collected specifically for the research being conducted, while secondary data represents information that was generated previously and originally was collected for a purpose other than research that refers to it (Saunders et al, 2009).

This research applies interviewing as a technique of qualitative primary data collection. Interviewing is defined as purposeful discussion that takes reasoning from at least one of the research questions. The extent of structure, order and predetermination determine the type of interview, of which three types are generally defined as per methodology theorists (Hancock, 1998; Saunders et al. 2009): structured, semi-structured and unstructured (in-depth interviews).

The type interviewing in this study is semi-structured, which means that interviewing process is guided by a predetermined set of questions and themes that should be covered, yet they may vary from interview to interview. This is justified in Saunders et al (2009, p.320) by some questions can be omitted, considering that a specific organisational context is encountered in relation with the research topic, similarly the order of questions may vary to allow more flexibility of the conversation flow. On the other hand, as researchers mention (ibid, 2009), additional questions may be required to explore research questions and objectives given the nature of the observed case. The data is audio-recorded and complemented by note-taking for easier focus on the most significant aspects.

This study implements qualitative semi-structured interview because of the conceptual nature of the explored phenomenon and its application in theory. Meaning that it explores how voluntary simplifiers are affected by their lifestyle

within the context of consumer behaviour. Therefore, description and exploration are of qualitative character, which strives for understanding reasons behind attitudes and opinions through reflexions. This purpose of interviewing is most effectively reached through qualitative interviewing (Saunders et al. 2009,). Moreover, the type of semi-structured interview in this study is one-to-one, which means only interviewer and interviewee are present during the interviewing session.

Regarding the timeframe, this study's implements one time measurement through a set of individual sessions conducted on the predetermined dates between 15-25th of April 2017. One time measurements were used because research presumes no comparison between two states or variables. Opposed to comparison that requires at least two sets of interviewing to retrieve data for comparison, this research aims at depicting reasoning and attitudes of a phenomenon within a determined context. This conceptual character justifies the choice of one time measurement, which later analysed and used for generating conclusions that correspond with the objectives

3.3 Sampling

Saunders et al. (2009, 210) notes that research objectives and questions determine whether research implements sampling or every possible case or member fits for data collection and analysis, which is called census. The goal of this research is to gather information that describes a predetermined population. Thus, sampling must be applied to reduce the scale of the study. In this way, the research is narrowed through collecting and analysing data from a social sub-group composed of individuals sharing common characteristics relevant for the objectives and questions.

Sampling design is used to ensure the necessary extent of precision and focus of the primary data collection. Since the goal of the research is to provide deeper insight about the concept of reduced consumption, the study approaches only those who are involved into this practice. This means that research requires non-probability sample (not census, non-random), which allows certain generalisation but not on the statistical grounds as stated in methodology theory (ibid, 2009, 213). This explains that generalisation in this case is required to describe the conceptual (qualitative) element, which does not provide any statistical conclusions.

Non-probability, as per Saunders et al. (2009), stands for researcher's individual criteria applied to selection of studied sample, meaning that is free from random sample and probability selection. In this case probability sampling, will generate irrelevant information, because only individuals belonging to specific social phenomena group should be considered, rather than random population. This study implements self-selection sample, which means researcher's publication about the respondents needed and results into data collection from those who agreed to participate.

During the process of the research it was found that individuals resisting to consumer society can be segmented into various groups, all of which are driven by various justifications against consumerism, thus their behaviour has different reasoning. Thus, sample framing was applied to consider only one group of non-consumers – voluntary simplifiers. This group is characterised not only by opposition to traditional consumer practices and negativity towards materialism, but appear a unique group as they are free from political, social and environmental influences in their choice. Moreover, the group has the ability and opportunity to benefit from consumerist world, but prefer not to do so. Overall, it means that voluntary simplifiers are motivated primarily by intrinsic factors of personality, which makes them unique among other groups of consumption reducers (environmentalists, social activists, ethical consumers, boycotting consumers, etc.). This type of reasoning was the major sampling criterion that limited the research to voluntary simplicity – a social group that unique in terms of general population, moreover, different from other reduced consumption population. This group was considered as experts of non-materialistic lifestyle, as such appears to be inherent for their personal experiences.

Because of the study's phenomenological nature, other demographical limitations (nationality, ethnicity, religion) were not applied, as research aims at describing the consumer behaviour within the concept of voluntary simplicity. This explains why demographic characteristics were mostly neglected within the study's context. Shared characteristic of the interviewees is practice of simplicity, which appears as a core phenomenon of the study.

Regarding the sample size Edwards et al. (2013) suggests that it depends on the nature of the research, where the key issue is the ability to create convincing

narrative based on rich detail and complexity, thus even single interview session can be enough, if the phenomenon and interviewee are unique and in certain correlation. The concept of data saturation is useful in this concern. It means that ideal number of interviews is not reached until interviewees are not telling them anything that they have not heard before (ibid., 2013). In other words, when information retrieved transforms into certain pattern of meanings, this means concept can be concluded based on this number. As researchers (ibid., 2013) warn, this technique may be challenging because of sampling, analysis and collection of data should be performed simultaneously as the process of interviewing goes.

To face this challenge, research ensured 20 interviewees from simplicity communities (theminimaslists.com; similicityinstitute.org; exilelifestyle.com) to be ready for the interviewing. If the pattern is recognised at less number than 20, then data gathered at that point will be considered fulfilling for describing the phenomenon and identifying the key elements of consumer behaviour exercised by the simplifiers. If after 20 personal interviews, the result will still demonstrate scattered and extremely varying character, then research must be either restructured to narrow the focus in questions or quantity of interviewees should be increased.

The sample audience was reached through web-communities, that promote the ideology of voluntary simplicity (theminimaslists.com; similicityinstitute.org; exilelifestyle.com). First, administrators of these resources were accessed with an explanation of the research and request to provide connection with a limited number of subscribers. Later, more than 50 e-mails were received from people affirming they are practicing simplicity lifestyle. Communication process identified the final sample of 20 “strong” simplifiers as these defined by Etzioni (1999). This was necessary to ensure focus and clear perspective towards lifestyle. Possible interview sessions were planned with these individuals. All prospective interviewees complied within requirements, which included – time of practicing simplicity lifestyle – 6 months or more; age between 20 and 30 years old; confirm their attitude to consumption (to filter out other representations of simplicity lifestyles by fitting the definition of voluntary simplicity and active involvement in this lifestyle). To ensure reliability representatives of each gender group were equally presented in the sample.

3.4 Data analysis

Analysis refers to the process of dividing data into components to clarify the meanings and correlations of components. Data analysis in qualitative research is associated with data display. Data display and analysis stand for process of collecting and analysing data, involving three concurrent subprocesses: data reduction, data display, and drawing and verifying conclusions (Saunders et al. 2009). As per theory (ibid, 2009, 489) qualitative data analysis and collection can be approached from either deductive or inductive perspective. Inductive character in research stands for creating a theory based on data, while deductive approach means utilising existing theory to structure the research and analysis processes. Approach of the study may vary depending on the wealth of existing literature on the topic. Deductive approach requires plenty of existing data to deduct the information from, while inductive approach normally means that information is predominantly generated within the study. Apart from method of using theory (building versus relying), data analysis approaches vary in other aspect: time resources required, data type predisposition, scientific principles significance, structure flexibility, clarity of definitions, need to generalise, etc. Timeframe in deductive approach requires more time spend for preparations and setting up before the data collection and analysis, whereas inductive approach devotes more profound and sequential elaboration of data collection and analysis. Deductive approach needs scientific implementation, quantitative data collection, clear structure, researcher's independence, while inductive, on the contrary, allows more flexibility, adaptability and inclination towards non-numerical understanding and meaning. Nevertheless, similarly as data types, collection and analysis methods, research approaches also can be combined. Moreover, Saunders et al. (2009, 127) suggest that despite the clear divisions between two approaches, combining these is possible and even appears to be advantageous in many cases.

As per this aspect of methodological framework, this study implements combined research approach. Deductive approach, though, is dominant, as data secondary data on general concept of consumer behaviour, same as theory about voluntary simplicity movement. In this research, phenomenon of voluntary simplicity was investigated deductively. Inductive reasoning approach is present through certain

elements, such as collection of qualitative data, definitions' ambiguity (perspectivism), interpretive flexibility of structure and diminished focus on generalisation.

Data analysis includes processes targeted at extracting and presenting value out of the collected information. As per Saunders et al. (2009, 490) these processes in qualitative research are: summarising, categorisation and structuring – all applied to explanatory meanings. These can be used separately or in combination, which in any case pursues the goal of data interpretation. Process of interpretation includes stages of comprehending the data, followed by integration from transcripts and notes, after – identifying key patterns for further exploration, and finally developing, drawing and verifying conclusions (ibid, 2009. 491).

Summarising means condensing the meaning of large amounts of text into fewer words (ibid, 2009, 491). This study implemented summarising data through notes and transcripts produced as a compressed result of interviewing. Compression in this case means continuous narrative's transformation into meaningful data.

Data categorisation was applied since the secondary data collection and discussion. It prepared the categories that were explored during the primary data collection stage. Categories were determined by the consumer behaviour theory as it identifies stages of decision process. These stages were applied within the context of interviewees' lifestyle, who generated the primary data necessary for providing meaningful explanation to the general categories of decision process and consumer behaviour.

Last stage of data analysis was conducted with the help of analytical tool known as explanation building. This analytical tool is designed to test a theoretical proposition, which as per Yin (2003) cited by Saunders et al. (2009, 501) uses following stages:

1. Devising a theoretically based proposition, which is later to be tested
2. Data collection for comparison with the proposition
3. Amending the proposition if necessary
4. Undertake another round of data collection to compare with the revised proposition
5. Revise the proposition based on new findings
6. Undertake further iterations to achieve satisfactory explanation

This version of staging was conducted during the study. Firstly, the theoretical proposition was created through secondary data collection and analysis. In this way,

the study has covered decision process and lifestyles in consumer behaviour. During the second stage data was collected to clarify the explored phenomenon of voluntary simplicity. Then, proposition statement was adjusted, as research focused only on particular aspects of consumer behaviour (decision-making), same as consider more precise population for comparison (strong simplifiers). Finally, meanings were derieved through forming up an explanation of voluntary simplicity within the framework of consumer behaviour.

3.5 Research implementation

During this study, primary data was collected from the individuals practicing voluntary simplicity lifestyle. This audience was chosen predominantly because of their unique ideology, which exemplifies the most authentic form of non-materialist lifestyle. Respondents were chosen based on the factor of belongingness to the simplifiers group, which was reached through web-communities promoting this lifestyle. When search for participants was announced, prospective interviewees were informed about the goal of the study and its educational character. Additionally, the complete anonymousness was guaranteed. After picking up the people that represented simplicity more clearly, researcher and interviewees agreed on date and time that will fit the most in the end of April, 2017. Additionally, all 20 preliminary chosen interviewees were informed that interviews number could be reduced as research objectives may be satisfied with fewer amount of interview sessions than planned. The goal of the study was reached after 11 interviews. It was signified when clear pattern became obvious based on the conducted interviews. Thus, other 9 individuals were informed of the interview cancellation and thanked for their readiness to contribute.

The objective of interviewing was to explore consumer decision-making of targeted audience. The introduction part of the interview aimed at establishing the validity and common understanding of the researched phenomenon. Thus, study aimed to understand how voluntary simplifiers exercise consumption process and how the perceive themselves within consumption setting. It was determined in the beginning

that the conversation will refer to high-involvement purchasing. High-involvement was defined as the type of discussed purchasing, because of it most clearly demonstrates all decision-making stages. The key emphasis of the interviewing was to understand every step of decision-making, which was addressed through asking subsequent questions regarding stages of the decision process and how it is practiced by interviewed individuals.

Interviewing process was designed to create a relaxed communication between the interviewee and interviewer. The purpose was to explore the behavioural aspects of voluntary simplifiers in relation with consumption. Protocol of the interview can be found in paper's appendices section (Appendix 1). The interviewing process started from introduction phrase, which was meant to inform the interviewee about the ongoing process, research purpose and confidentiality. In all the cases respondents were contacted in advance via e-mail or social networks. Introduction phrase was also send as a text before the start of the interview. This served as a notification of the process to start, so that the call would not be unexpected. When the interview started, interviewer asked for participant's confirmation of reading the notice. Actual interview process started with the question that aimed at verifying the common understanding of the key terminology. The purpose of this is verification of the fact that participant is from the relevant audience. Following sections were designed to encourage interest and initiate talking about the decision process. Questions were designed to discover what are the practices of simplicity implemented by the respondent. It was constructed to initiate respondent's description of all 5 stages of decision-making in consumption process, which was needed to understand the characteristics of voluntary simplifiers as consumers. The additional purpose was to understand if simplifiers have materialistic (consumerist) affluence in self-perception. Certain questions focused on determining actual and ideal states, and how these are correlated with consumption process. Finally, additional questions were prepared if discussion will require in-depth clarification of the decision process as it is practiced by the interviewee.

The interviews were conducted sequentially within the timeframe of 10 days, April, 2017. 11 interviewees were successfully contacted for conducting and internet-mediated interviews. Software used for the process includes various audio

communication services: FaceTime, Skype and Telegram. These were the preference tools chosen by participants. Recording was implemented with the use of QuickTime screen recording function. Respondents were informed of possibility to deny from answering questions and were informed that camera can be switched off. Interviews length was within 30-45 minutes. The respondents were of both genders, various nationalities and backgrounds. These variables were not considered and assumed as irrelevant for the study. Limiting variables were only age and fact of continuous involvement to voluntary simplicity practices. Semi-structured interview served as a data collection method, while explanation building was used as an analytical tool and relied on summarised notes and transcripts. The plan of the interview is attached in appendices (Appendix 1).

4 Results

Research results presented in this chapter were collected during the qualitative interviewing with 9 individuals practicing voluntary simplicity lifestyle. The purpose was to determine how voluntary simplifiers behave as consumers in regards with consumer decision making. This was explored using the traditional scheme of decision process by Hawkins and Mothersbaugh (2013). The transcripts of interviewing sessions were summarised using the explanation building analysis technique.

The stages of consumer decision process were discussed in the theoretical part of the paper. Below is the model of this process with all stages mentioned (Figure 2). Decision process based on interviewee's responses is described in subsequent subchapters of this chapter.

To ensure clarity, respondents were asked about their decision process regarding high involvement purchases. Additionally, it was ensured that all respondents have the opportunity and ability for buying.

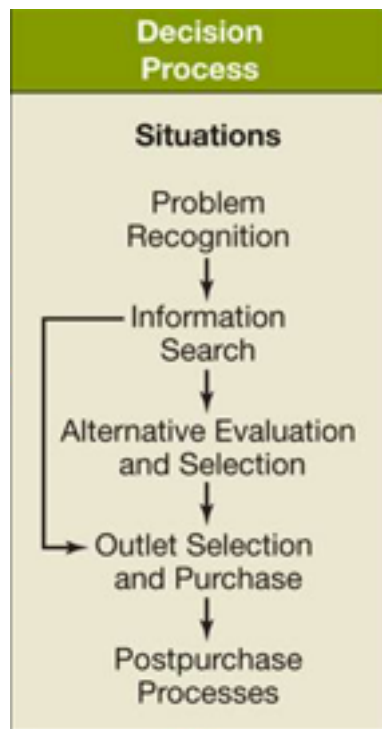


Figure 2. Consumer decision process (Hawkins and Mothersbaugh, 2013)

4.1 Problem recognition

Voluntary simplifiers seem to approach first stage of consumer decision process consciously and carefully. Respondents answers allow to justify that the lifestyle and ideology of simplifiers liberated them from identifying ideal state and ideal self-concept. When asked about high involvement purchases (not basic groceries) respondents explained that they do not immediately create the desired state, but try to postpone accepting the need and move to stage of information search. It was mentioned that respondents intentionally doubt the necessity of the purchase. For example, one said:

I really love music, but even when my headphones were broken, I simply spend few weeks running and cooking in silence, then I realise music is not the most important...

Another respondent expressed similar attitude:

...it often happens with stuff like hair-dryer or straightener (...) it just dies! But I do not immediately rush to get a new one and wait,

just to see how it changes my life (...) and sometimes I realise there is no need to get a new one”.

Additionally, It was discovered that simplifiers are inclined to question not just needs of theirs, but products that are commonly considered as necessities. This relates to generally acquired products apart from physiologically required ones. Some examples from the responses:

I live in a capital city [Copenhagen] where bicycles are extremely popular, but once I’ve suddenly realised that campus is in the centre, I live nearby, my friends are always around, same are all the bars and cafes...so I sold my bicycle and started to enjoy walking.

...after moving to a new flat and struggling to find a good coach...we’ve discussed it and decided that we can have a nice living room without a sofa...later we’ve concluded the same about TV.

Respondents affirmed that advertising and other marketing tools do not affect the consumer problem (need, want) acceptance. Need to buy is internally-driven, if not by necessity then only after the need is accepted as personally valuable. As per mentioned quote, headphones were bought as they fit the personal values. While hair straightener was considered unnecessary, because (also after elaboration) it was identified as a product that does not complement any intrinsic values, as respondent stated that: “...I’ve realised I like myself with my curly hair”. This means that simplifiers, at this stage, are more resistant to subconscious need to change the actual state to formal ideal one. It can be explained by independence from consumer environment and reduced marketing exposure, which means that discrepancy between actual and ideal states is not created under external stimuli of the abovementioned.

4.2 Information search

When respondents accept the fact of need or want is existing and they are ready to buy the product, they search for information. There was not any resistance indicated

at this stage as internal search for information was already implemented during the problem recognition stage: “...I always ask myself – do I really need this thing? (...) and after I recall how I used something similar before”. Respondents expressed their negativity towards promotional materials like catalogues and special offer advertisements. Interviewees demonstrated awareness of subconscious effect of continual exposure to marketing.

...not only advertising bothers me, but brands, I mean logotypes – I don't want to perceive this information at, it makes me less conscious about what I want.

...when I was buying everything seemed nice, back then I was heavily affected by how products are shown and described...now it makes me regret how much money I've spend before I chanced upon the simplicity blog.

I remember myself and smile when I see a person all covered in branded clothes, often happens in the gym: I can't find a person, all I see brands it appreciates, is it just me or...?

Normally, information search is very profound. Nevertheless, opposite approach to information search is predetermination. This means that purchasing pattern is schematised by simplifiers through predesigning the consumer behaviour to reduce effort. Often it leads to re-purchase of the previously used product. Notable characteristic was predisposition to experiential information search. The pattern was determined that simplifiers have the tendency to seek for similar product usage in the past, before buying a new one, and remember what was wrong and right, more importantly – why they stopped using it. Using this, simplifiers tend to pre-collect the information, create a purchasing “formula” and then follow it, which makes shopping more functional and less emotional or personal.

In similar manner simplifiers always set up the budget limitation already on the stage of information search, emphasising importance of it being set prior to comparing and evaluating options.

I think it helps a lot if I determine in advance how much will be spent, that later I won't go for it if its price but seems extremely cool because of its design or advertising magic.

Regarding the external sources of follow the pattern of non-marketer-dominated sources, among which there were opinion leaders identified. As opinion leaders, respondents mentioned “like-minded people” and “ones who understand that things are not important”. It was explained that other simplifiers were meant (addressed as “minimalists”, “non-material people” and jokingly “monks”).

4.3 Alternatives evaluation

It was determined that this stage of decision-making process appears to be either very profound or skipped. This means that generally simplifiers are predisposed to one of two scenarios: in-depth and detailed investigation of alternatives or repeating the previous experiences. First occurs in cases when the product category is new and unknown, whereas repeating earlier patterns is practiced when the product category is familiar to consumer.

Information search and (pre-purchase) evaluation stage are combined in case of voluntary simplifiers. All interviewees stressed the importance of systematisation and simplification of these stages. Below quotes demonstrate these implications.

I don't need to think and compare even costly products, quite often I just buy what I've used before (...) yes, everything: shoes, same headphones, same clothes

I am a strictly organised shopper – it's how I avoid buying randomly

...I'm always aware of where to look for and what to look for

I have a clear, kind of universal, cross product understanding of a concept I like, you can notice all of my belongings are similar – solid coloured, unflashy, simple and it makes me complete in a way

In case of high involvement purchase of a completely new product (no repetition possible) respondents were asked to identify the evaluative criteria – characteristics

they value the most. Interviewed simplifiers expressed admiration for minimalist aesthetics, practicality, precise functionality. Moreover, they showed awareness and clear understanding of requirements they seek in products. Summarised categories of most favourable and most unfavourable characteristics are shown below (Table 1).

Table 1. Product characteristics

Favourable	Logical (functional, durable) Clean (aesthetical, minimalistic) Obvious (simple, concise, single purpose) Solid (monolith, single colour) Unflashy (unpretentious) Basic (plain, independent)
Unfavourable	Tasteless (excessive, superfluous) Excessive (overly coloured, obtrusively branded) Luxurious (sparkling, flashy, overpriced) Unreasonably complex (multifunctional, unobvious) Composing (dispersed, partial)

Judgement of products' favourability is based on simplicity and clarity. Respondents described their favourite products as unified and serving single purpose, understandable from the first glance and demanding no user learning. The appearance should be minimal, modest and draw as less attention as possible. It was mentioned that branding should be discreet because it helps avoiding judgements concerning income and materialistic character of the owner. Unfavourable characteristics are mostly opposites to favourable ones. Some of the mentioned adjectives appeared to be antonymous to the favourable ones, which may indirectly conclude clear and definite need understanding. Notably, discussion have revealed the negative attitude towards what products that require additional purchases (partial products). Simplifiers are predisposed to avoiding buying supplementary items for what they already own.

Some interviewees explained that they use simplification and consume identical products (e.g., clothes) to reduce the symbolic meaning and uniqueness of every

item. Further exploration of this topic during the discussion (with 3 interviewees) revealed that this helps to be indifferent to possessions beyond their key purpose.

I don't want to have a favourite pair of jeans or whatever, that's why I have only 3 of those – same model, same colour.

I have 10 t-shirts: 5 black ones, 5 white ones (...) it makes me free from choosing or being attached to a thing that is just a thing.

Additionally, on this stage interviewees described their mental activity in a way that can generally be called a search for objective comprehension. Unlike this term is described by Hoyer et al. (2013), simplifiers strive to comprehend the product's nature, not the communicated message. Thus, they are likely to be indifferent towards superficial message and seek for information from sources they consider credible. This is concluded based on following quotes.

I have never taken promotions seriously, even reviews seem doubtful to me as – I don't know if marketers, webstore moderators and "reviewers" are same people or not.

If I want to buy a bike I'd rather find an enthusiast (...) and ask him in person (...) but would never believe these YouTubers with thousands of views – they are obviously paid to promote....

...even 30-dollar price is crucial (...) if I do not understand a single thing on the package, I'd go and google whatever it boasts about.

4.4 Outlet selection and purchase

Similar trend also noticed in buying and choice of the store to buy from. It often appears to be the same store and place where similar (high involvement) purchase took place. Predictably, simplifiers follow the same pattern of systematisation and simplification of this part of the process. This contradicts with the theory because it means that even with high-effort purchases consumer behave on nominal decision making, which is a feature of low-effort purchasing. There is strong emphasis on trust and loyalty based on previous experiences.

Interviewees mentioned that they prefer online shopping over physical purchase, but only in case they are familiar with product and know that the webstore is reliable. Regarding using the webstores interviewees stressed the importance of reduced interaction with consumer environment: “easier to buy only what I need”; “less advertising”; “not stressed”; “buying seems less obligatory”. During the purchase in physical stores, interviewees reported conscious and even constrained behaviour concerning unplanned purchases. It allows concluding that compulsive behaviour – is what simplifiers deliberately avoid.

There were two types of justifications of payment methods in physical shops and places like bars. Interviewees that demonstrated their preference to using cash money, mentioned that it “allows controlling budget” and “always know how much I have”. This can be transcribed as inclination towards control and consciousness. Other interviewees justified their preference towards using bank cards through emphasising practical usability: “easier to use” and “faster”. However, bank card preference was supplemented with comments on importance of expenses control to avoid being in debt.

4.5 Post-purchase

Collected reflections on post-purchase behaviour and evaluation demonstrate the non-materialistic character of voluntary simplicity lifestyle. Interviewees expressed their moderate concern about even costly purchases. Evaluation normally was reported as rapid and obvious.

it is okay if it makes the work it should.

I don't think much about products; I only use them.

Notably, after being asked about dissatisfactory purchases, interviewees generally reported the intention to get rid of the item. This was explained as the part of decluttering practice.

I don't keep things that I don't like (...) in fact, I believe that I've got only what brings value to me...

*if it (product) is something I regret buying, I try to resell (...) if
returning is not possible.*

*Once a season I collect all the bulls*it I don't need and throw away,
give away or sell it in second-hand communities on Facebook.*

Further exploration of the last stage of decision-making demonstrated that interviewees practice decreased personal attachment to the purchased products. This means that symbolic meaning of products is diminished. Therefore, it assumes that the correlation between brand (and product) and self-concept appears to be minimised to “no meaning”, “no connection”. Nevertheless, some answers have demonstrated opposite correlation between self-concept and product/brand meaning. This means that simplifiers may identify themselves with certain products and even brands, in some cases with pronounced admiration. As described in every case these products are very specific, unique and valued because of certain personal experiences, not products nominal value.

5 Conclusions

5.1 Results summary

Data interpretation provided in previous section allowed filtering out the irrelevant parts of the conversation. Scattered reflections of respondents covered the decision process as per their personal understanding. The information was analysed, which allowed summarising. In this way, repetitive and similar answers allowed identifying the behavioural pattern of decision process applicable to this group of consumers. This pattern consists of behavioural characteristics occurring at every stage of the decision process. Summary of results is provided in the table below (Table 1). Left column indicates the stage of decision process, while the right one provides the most prominent characteristics of the decision-making identified by the respondents during the corresponding stage.

Glossary of terms (characteristics) definitions is provided as an appendix to the paper (Appendix 2) – all terms are clarified by the author to ensure consistency of meanings within the context of the study.

Table 2. Decision process characteristics of voluntary simplifiers

Stage	Key characteristics
Problem recognition	Resistance to problem, need denial, postponing information search, need examination, reduced marketing effect, reduced consumer environment exposure, non-consumer ideal state, self-sufficient actual state.
Information Search	Predetermination, data systematisation, effort minimisation, value exploration, like-minded opinion leaders, reduced consumer environment, reduced marketing exposure, setting budget allowance, experiential search, need examination, no-necessities attitude.
Alternatives Evaluation	Effort minimisation, simplification, need awareness, precise evaluation criteria, objective comprehension, reduced value for novelty and variety,
Purchase & Store Selection	Expenditure control and awareness, planning, repetitive purchases, consumer environment avoidance, web-shopping preference, non-compulsive buying, reduced symbolic meaning, fully planned purchasing.
Post-purchase Evaluation	Product return, detachment (depersonalisation), categorical attitude.

Voluntary simplifiers have a high degree of marketing actions awareness, which leads to increased general consumer consciousness. This allows them to implement resistance to consumer environment and marketing effort in demand stimulation. This counteraction to consumption is driven by the lifestyle devoid of material affluence.

Resistance to consumption becomes obvious from the beginning and throughout the decision-making process. Consumer behaviour of voluntary simplifiers can be characterised with extreme consumer consciousness and self-awareness (as consumers). These mental capabilities allow deliberate avoidance of consumer environment and reduction of marketing influence. Often it may lead to decision not consider buying anything in result of need examination, which often causes need denial. Consumption process of simplifiers is a subject of strict control, as budget limitation and awareness are practiced on the stage prior to information search, as well as during the initial purchase.

Additionally, consumer consciousness is expressed in clear conceptual understanding of favourable products, expressed in predetermined likes and dislikes (Table 1). This allows effective evaluation of alternatives. Purchasing of simplifiers is often guided by prior knowledge and reduced value of novelty, which is expressed in repetitive purchases and indifference to variety. Diminished seek of variety and novelty is additionally driven by desire to minimise the effort during decision making. When evaluating previously unknown products, simplifiers strive to objective comprehension, which is ensured by mindful neglect of the emotional and symbolic message. Moreover, consumer awareness is supported by pronounced self-sufficiency in a way of complete satisfaction with actual self. While ideal self is not identified, or identified outside the consumer and material framework (disassociated from purchasing and belongings). Generally, it appears that voluntary simplifiers are consumers that can be characterised with constant control of their purchase decision-making and prefer making decisions outside of the consumer environment.

5.2 Discussion

The research described the decision-making pattern based on qualitative semi-structured interviewing. It has demonstrated that categorical non-materialism of simplicity lifestyle values is prominent throughout the decision-making process. Voluntary simplifiers, nevertheless, can be targeted as a consumer segment. First, it should be defined if this customer segment is what brand is about to target. Because of unique consumer behaviour are specific, targeting simplifiers can require categorical readjustments of marketing strategy, which may lead to loss of

awareness among general consumer audience. Based on the analysis of the decision-making process, the key recommendation will be the focus on unobtrusive marketing techniques. This may cause sympathy of simplifiers as they are negatively predisposed towards active promotions and overly prominent branding. Explored decision process is conscious and driven by non-material values, thus, simplifiers cautiously analyse every purchase. Diminished influence of marketing means that product becomes crucial as assumptions are likely to be made about the product. Therefore, logical suggestion would be focusing on design and aesthetics that address evaluation attributes and desirable product characteristics. Supposedly, these characteristics could also determine the advertising. Advertising should not be aggressive and promote key values of the simplicity lifestyle. Other than that, decisions of simplifiers are stable and repetitive, which allows decreasing the product range if brand seeks for this consumer group's loyalty. Moreover, simplifiers seem to be very aware about consumption process, therefore can reflect on consumer behaviour devoid of any fickleness.

The data generated during the study that corresponds with consumer behaviour theory. Generally, it confirmed the correlation between lifestyle and decision-making process. Nevertheless, consumer behaviour studies do not provide reference on how anti-consumer lifestyles are practiced in consumer environment. Previous studies on voluntary simplicity and other representations of non-materialist lifestyles provided general information predominantly from the perspective of sociology and psychology. This research provided the expansion of existing theory through adding contextual knowledge concerning the contradictory relationship between consumption process and non-materialistic values. It suggests that marketers can consider non-consumer groups as possible consumer segment that can be successfully targeted if business objectives require this.

The research aimed at achieving utterly specific and uncommon goals. It provided the focused information that has limited application. In other words, it stands out of the general marketing research and can only serve as a reference for a specific business objectives. Generally, marketers are unlikely to implement the strategic adjustment to target the voluntary simplifiers. Nevertheless, in case if company's brand concept considers non-materialistic segment of consumers, it may find useful

insights on the example of voluntary simplifiers' decision-making process. In this case targeting non-materialists is a challenging task, thus will require profound understanding of the ideology and consumption process of those who generally tend to avoid shopping.

The research was conducted based on the fundamental consumer behaviour theoretical frameworks by Hoyer et al. (2013), Hawkins and Mothersbaugh (2013) and Blackwell et al. (2006). Thus, the understanding of the core theoretical implications is relatively modern as there are no drastic changes in consumer behaviour theory since these publications were renewed.

Limitations and further research

Marketing interpretations of this study should be supported by additional research dedicated to other aspects of consumer behaviour of the studied group. This study served general goal of depicting the process of decision making by generalising only qualitative data collected from the small-scale of individuals strictly following the principles and ideology of the voluntary simplicity lifestyle. Demographic variables can be used to draw differences within non-materialist lifestyles. Based on this, prospective research could focus on comparing how voluntary simplicity is practiced in different countries (in this research most participants were from different countries). This research intend to provide conceptual data that reveals how simplifiers are generally behaving.

Other limitation of the research concerns involvement level. To clearly demonstrate the purchase behaviour stages, interviewees were asked mostly about high-involvement purchases (remembering or imagining future ones). Thus, it means that this research applies only to high involvement. It will be beneficial to study also the decision process on low involvement, which may show profound results on consumer behaviour of this social group.

Moreover, product characteristics determined by the research were not a core subject of the study but only a determinant of the alternatives evaluation stage of decision making. Thus, these characteristics should be confirmed with larger sample research. In this way, other studies can establish brand identity scheme that will possess the qualities valued by non-materialist individuals. This is already

implemented by some active brands that refrain from aggressive advertising and focus on product self-exploratory nature of minimalist aesthetics (e.g., COS, Apple, BauWatches, Junghans Max Bill). Moreover, branding strategy inclines more often towards minimising excessive visual elements of brand identity (simpler logos, concise descriptors, single-page websites, etc).

Further research has a wider range of implementation in consumer psychology and marketing ethics fields. One of the perspective directions is the exploration of the harmful nature of consumerism. Non-materialist ideology proposes that consumption may be manipulated and people are not completely controlling their buying behaviour. This, in turn, makes individuals work more, constantly pursuing material needs. New needs never cease to be identified in consumer society, as the new wants (opportunities to consume) are actively created by brand-new businesses and developing technologies. This establishes a position of materialism promoted by marketing and general consumer environment is a subject of marketing ethics research. Harmful nature of consumerism can be investigated through neuromarketing research, which has the capacity to confirm or disprove consumption's addictiveness, for instance. Similarly, neuroscience tools applied in marketing field may be used to establish clearer scientific ground concerning control and consciousness over consumer decisions, same as to prove how ideal consumer state alters the authentic identity of individuals actively involved into consumer process and environment.

Validity and reliability

Reliability of the research justifies by its limited focus and explanatory nature. The objective was to demonstrate how phenomenon of voluntary simplicity affects consumer decision making. Qualitative data type describes the pattern practiced by voluntary simplicity population and relates only to decision making process. This still does not clarify what is general consumer behaviour of voluntary simplifiers. Primarily because there are other aspects of consumer behaviour apart from decision-making, elements of lifestyle (psychographics). Secondly, there are other social groups and lifestyles that share values opposite to materialistic ones. Thus, crucial argument of research's validity is its focus, meaning that it is not applied on

general aspects of consumer behaviour, most importantly – does not provide any statistical data, therefore is not applied to general population.

According to Maxwell's (1992) qualitative research validity guidelines, 5 major criteria of validity: descriptive, interpretive, theoretical, generalisability and evaluative. Descriptive validity represents the quality of data collection and transcription. This is satisfied with the fact that studied sample population was chosen only from voluntary simplicity communities, moreover it was verified that researcher and participants have common understanding of lifestyle. Moreover, researcher verified that interviewed individuals identify themselves as voluntary simplifiers for a considerable period. Interpretive validity is aimed at proving that researcher's analysis of information is not altering the opinions of interviewees. This is ensured through providing the quotes from the original interviewing transcripts. Theoretical validity is established through referring to reliable sources of literature when establishing the framework to rely on. Theory is taken from fundamental consumer behaviour theory publications and supplemented by peer-reviewed articles. Generalisability ensures that research results are expressed as generally understandable. Data categorisation was applied to ensure this (Tables 1-2). In addition, to ensure clarity, thesis paper includes brief terminological glossary used during the explanation (Appendix 2).

Based on this, taking study's limited focus into consideration, the research can be seen as reliable and valid in terms of qualitative research evaluative criteria. The findings can be used in marketing practice as guidelines for adjustments to fit the studied populations values and affect its consumer behaviour. Predominantly, though, this study encourages further academic research of voluntary simplicity and other non-materialistic lifestyles. Moreover, as mentioned earlier, it provides a hint about consumerism being a prospective issue to be faced in terms of marketing and business ethics.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Interview plan (protocol)

Introduction phrase (send before the start of the interview)

“Hello, my name is Alexander. I am an International Business student from JAMK University of Applied Sciences (Jyväskylä, Finland). I am conducting a research about non-material lifestyle. The purpose of the interview is to explore the purchase decision process as exercised by people who live a lifestyle of voluntary simplicity. There are no correct and incorrect answers, same as desirable or unwanted ones. I expect you to say what you sincerely think, feel and do. You are free to tell me if you prefer avoid answering certain question or stop the interviewing process. If you want to see me – you can ask me to turn on the camera. From you I need only the ability to talk, so you are not obliged to turn the camera for me. Our conversation is going to be only audio-recorded. Everything you say will be kept confidential – only I am aware that these are your answers. Other than that, your responses may partially be mentioned as nameless quotes in my thesis work. There won't be any exposure of your name, nickname, email address or any other personal information.”

1. Verification and common meaning establishment

***Question:** Please confirm that you are [interviewee's name] and I am calling you at the comfortable time we have earlier agreed on.

***Question:** I should make sure our understanding of voluntary simplicity lifestyle is the same. Please, explain your understanding of simplicity?

***Note:** Voluntary simplicity is – conscious reduction of acquisition and consumption for a less materialistic lifestyle and more focus on non-consumer life (Hoyer et al., 2013).

2. Practices Identification

***Question:** How did you start practicing simplicity (adjust if respondent uses other term – e.g.: minimalism) Describe the motivations behind this shift.

***Question:** Could you briefly tell me how is it expressed through your lifestyle.

***Possible questions and topics:**

- What was the main reason?
- How it changed with time?
- What are the parts of your life simplicity influenced the most?
- Can you call yourself a non-materialistic person?

***Question:** Would you please tell more about this most simplified aspect of your life?

Note: work, housekeeping, leisure, family, personal budget - spending/saving, shopping, etc.

3. Problem Identification stage

Introduction: Ask about shopping in general, explain the meaning of high-effort, mention that the discussion is only about high effort purchasing.

***Question:** Do you plan to buy something costly or important in foreseeable future (not groceries)? Why do you need it?

***Question:** What will this purchase give you? How it will change you? (emphasise desired state discussion)

Note: Ask about other high effort purchases (past and prospective).

***Question:** How do you usually realise you have the need to buy something?

***Question:** How do you understand you need a product? How do you come to this conclusion?

***Question:** Could you describe how you perceive yourself now? (encourage description of actual state)

***Question:** Are you satisfied with that person?

***Question:** Do you think advertising make you want to buy something?

***Question:** What is your attitude to brands and promotions?

4. Information search

Note: Use the desired (mentioned earlier) product as reference.

***Question:** How do you seek for information about the product?

***Question:** Could you describe/explain what are you thought after you realise that you need to buy a product?

***Question:** Do you often realise that you want to buy smth, rapidly investigate it and buy almost at the same time? (only high effort)

Additionally: Compulsive buying? Stress and shopping?

***Question:** How do you search for information?

***Question:** Do you consider promotions? How they affect your decisions?

***Question:** When and how do you realise that it is shopping time?

Note: Clothes for example.

5. Evaluation

***Question:** Do you consider alternative options before buying something? How do you identify these options? How many? How are they filtered (if many)?

***Question:** How do you compare options (alternatives)?

***Question:** What characteristics/attributes are the most important for you? What kind of products you dislike? (avoid examples)

Note: if hard to answer - ask about the last most expensive purchase

6. Purchase

***Question:** How do you behave in the shop? (structure? plan?)

(Note: Ask about different ones: clothing, groceries, furniture, etc.)

***Question:** What is your favourable/preferable payment method?

7. Post-purchase

***Question:** What happens after you buy something? How do you interact with the product? What do you feel? (Use example if needed)

***Question:** When you affirm that you liked or disliked the product, what are you thoughts? How do you conclude one or another? Based on what?

***Question:** Do you practice any simplicity activities? (Producing own products, decluttering, growing food, repairing yourself)

*Question: How often do you return products? Why?

*Question: Are there any items/things you are appreciate very much? Or proud to obtain? (explore personal relation and product meaning)

*Question: How do you imagine your self-development in future?

*Question: Do you think you have a certain status in society? How would you define yourself as part of a society?

*Question: How would you spend additional 1000 euro per month?

8. Other additional questions

*Question: Have you heard of Diderot effect?

*Question: Are you familiar with the feeling of dissatisfaction with your old possessions after buying something new?

*Question: What do you consider the source of value? How would you define "quality of life"?

*Question: What would you like to afford then but you are unable now?

*Question: Would you like to earn more?

*Question: Do you recall any brands? Do you have any favourite brands? Why do you like this brand? (Or - why there are no favourite brands?)

*****end*****

Appendix 2.

Definitions of decision process characteristics

Resistance to problem – counteraction to accept consumer problem exists;

Need denial – negation of the consumer need;

Postponing information search – delaying next stage of decision process;

Need examination – questioning the necessity of prospective through exploration of personal motivation to buy;

Reduced marketing effect– avoidance of exposure to advertising and brands;

Reduced consumer environment exposure – need recognition and information search takes place before visiting stores;

Non-consumer ideal state – desired self-image is not related with purchases;

Self-sufficient actual state – satisfaction with the current self-image;

Predetermination – consumer behaviour follows the predesigned pattern of previous experiences;

Data systematisation – categorising the perceived information on products;

Effort minimisation – reduced involvement in the buying process through repetition;

Like-minded opinion leaders – an individual or resource promoting similar ideas and lifestyle;

Setting budget allowance – defining the limit of prospective expenditure;

Experiential search – referring to information retrieved from past experiences;

No-necessities attitude – mental predisposition free from obligatory and compulsory purchases;

Simplification – reducing the complexity;

Precise evaluation criteria – definitive and clear product characteristics;

Objective comprehension – understanding of product's real characteristics, devoid of promoted value consideration;

Expenditure control and awareness – consciousness of one's financial capability;

Repetitive purchasing – buying same product or same outlet

Planning – defining in advance;

Reduced variety – minimisation of variety within a product category, in which numerous items are usually consumed (clothes, accessories, cosmetics, etc);

Reduced novelty – diminished need for products different from other possessions;

Non-compulsive buying – conscious and mindful purchase behaviour;

Reduced symbolic meaning – minimised products value apart from its key purpose;

Detachment (depersonalisation) – deliberate or subconscious avoidance of relationship between product's symbolic meaning and self-concept;

Categorical attitude (evaluation) – definitive appreciation or denial, devoid of vagueness.